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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 003031

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TAGS: [GH](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: GHANA'S OPPOSITION NDC CHOOSES MILLS AS
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

REF: ACCRA 2269

Classified By: PolChief for reasons 1.5 d and e.

¶1. (U) Summary: Former Vice President and two-time presidential candidate John Evans Atta Mills was chosen to be the National Democratic Congress' presidential candidate in 2008 during a December 21 NDC party Congress. Unlike the 2005 NDC Convention, this Congress was peaceful and largely conciliatory. Mills appears to have broad support from within his party but will need to convince voters he is his own man and can overcome a history of electoral losses. Increased intra-party democracy in Ghana's main opposition party is a sign of the country's growing political maturity. End summary.

¶2. (U) On December 21, Ghana's main opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) party overwhelmingly elected John Evans Atta Mills as its presidential candidate for the 2008 presidential election. Mills won 81.4 percent of the votes cast by 1,720 delegates to the NDC's Special Delegates Congress in Accra. The other aspirants trailed with 8.7 percent of the vote for Dr. Ekwow Spio-Garbrah, 8.2 percent for Alhaji Mahama Iddrisu and 1.7 percent (just 28 votes) for Eddie Annan (see reftel for background on all the candidates). The losing candidates readily conceded defeat, promised to support Mills, and pledged that they would not leave the NDC or break away to form new parties.

Comment

¶3. (C) Mills was widely favored to win the NDC election, although most observers expected a closer race. While Mills has lost two consecutive presidential elections, delegates favored him because of his name recognition, strong reputation for integrity, and long history with the party. Mills' unusually vigorous speech at the convention may also have swayed those who have criticized him for being too mild-mannered, as well as those with reservations about his health. (Note: It is difficult to assess Mills' health. The much younger Spio-Garbrah claimed to Rawlings that Mills had an unspecified illness. Mills traveled to China and South Africa in the past few months for medical check-ups, which stirred media speculation about his health. Several well-informed contacts have told PolChief Mills has/had throat cancer. Other NDC sources close to Mills insist he only had sinus problems which developed as a result of his regular swimming. PolChief saw at the convention that Mills had lost weight but appeared energetic. End note.)

¶4. (C) Spio-Garbrah, the only other candidate observers thought might win the vote, lost support because of his previous splits with the party and his perceived abrasive style. Mills is an impressive, seasoned politician who

appears to have a groundswell of support from within his party. He faces many challenges as he moves toward 2008, including maintaining party unity and improving NDC finances.

To win, he will have to convince voters he can act independently from Rawlings (many question whether he is strong enough to be his own man), can overcome a history of losing elections, and can offer a brighter future than promised by the ruling NPP party (the NPP will not select a candidate until December 2007).

15. (C) The party congress stood in marked contrast to the 2005 NDC congress in Kofuridua, which was disorganized, marred by violence, and fractious (resulting in some long-time leaders splitting from the NDC to form the Democratic Freedom Party). In 2005, Rawlings dominated the event and was seen as the kingmaker in the election of party officials. This year's congress was festive and peaceful. Rawlings was low-key and publicly neutral in the election, urging delegates to be true to their constituencies. As is the tradition in Ghana, other parties greeted the Congress, with the exception of the break-away DFP which reportedly refused an invitation to the event. The NDC made a convincing effort to improve intra-party democracy, holding a UNDP-sponsored workshop on internal democracy several weeks before the Congress, fielding more candidates than ever in the flagbearer election, stressing unity in congress speeches, and cooperating closely with the Electoral Commission in running a smooth election. This effort at projecting greater unity and internal democracy is a positive step in Ghana's political development which should strengthen the NDC as it gears up for 2008.

Bio of John Evans Atta Mills

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16. (U) Professor John Evans Atta Mills, born July 21, 1944, received initial training in law at the University of Ghana and London School of Economics and Political Science, specializing in tax law. He later earned a Ph.D. in law from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He was a Fulbright Scholar at Stanford Law School in California (1970-71).

17. (U) He taught tax and corporate law at the University of Ghana for 25 years and was a visiting Professor at Temple Law School in Philadelphia, PA (1978-79, 1986-87) and Leiden University, Holland (1985-86). He spearheaded a commission that undertook a comprehensive review of Ghana's tax system and prepared a casebook on Ghana's income tax system.

18. (U) Mills was the Commissioner of the International Revenue Service of Ghana from 1988 to 1997. He served as Vice President of Ghana under Rawlings from January 1997 to January 2001. He was the NDC candidate in the 2000 presidential election, losing in a second round with 43.1% of the vote. He was again the NDC candidate during the 2004 presidential election, winning 44.7% of the vote, versus 52% for Kufuor. He is married with one son (born out of wedlock). He is an ethnic Fante from the Central Region.
BROWN